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GEORGE SKATZES

by Dan Cahill

On January 30, 1996, George Skatzes (pronounced like "Skates") was sentenced to death for the murders of two prisoners during the 11-day uprising in April 1993 at the maximum security Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville, Ohio.

During the uprising George acted as a peacekeeper and spokesman for prisoners. Many prisoners credit George with saving their lives during the riot. Former hostage guard Jeffrey Ratcliff asked the jurors to spare George's life, stating under oath that George helped protect two guards and even released a third guard who was badly injured. Ratcliff went on to say that he wouldn't be alive today if not for George. Surely the death toll from the uprising would have been much, much higher if not for George.

He's been sentenced to death because he refused to cooperate (snitch) with prison officials, who promised not to prosecute him if he would "cooperate." George became the target of the investigation because he had the courage to come forward and help negotiate a peaceful end to the uprising. As a spokesman, he became a symbol and a target.

The prisoners who actually committed the murders that George has been sentenced to death for haven't been charged with any crimes, or were given lenient sentences in exchange for their testimony against George.

Is that how justice works? The real killers get off the hook by blaming their crimes on someone else? They admitted that they killed the prisoners, but claim that George gave the order. These low-lifes would say anything to avoid the death penalty!

Assistant Franklin County prosecutor Dan Hogan stated, "Hopefully we've sent a message to any other inmates who might ever consider doing anything like this again." Yes, they intend to execute George to send us a message. But the message is: You can kill guards and prisoners during a riot and blame someone else for it afterwards--and the state will help protect you! Another message the state sends us with this verdict is: Don't get involved; don't step forward and try to stop the killings. Step aside and let it happen--otherwise you become a symbol and a target for state prosecution.

That's the real message, and justice was not served in the death penalty verdict George received. He's 49 years old and sitting on death row waiting for his appeals to run out and an execution date to be set.

The truth has to come out. We can't allow George to die as a symbol to send us a "message." I have known him for many years, and he's a good solid convict who's always willing to help someone else. Everyone who knows George agrees that he's innocent of these charges.

This is a desperate plea to support an innocent man. His sister has agreed to help form an outside support group and a defense committee for her brother. Anyone interested in making a financial contribution to his defense fund, or who would like to help organize support for George or wants more information about this case, contact:
Mrs. Jackie Bowers, P.O Box 1591 - Marion, Ohio 43301-1591

SUPPORT GEORGE SKATZES!

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